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COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Special Meeting

Monday, April 21, 2025
5:00 PM
Board of Education Central Office

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT : Chair Donna Antonacci, Vice-Chair Christopher Rivers, Secretary Margo Gignac, Michelle Millington, Rosemary Gignac and Stefanie Tracey-Calash.

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT : Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Jessica L. Kuckel, Bacon Academy (BA) Principal Amy Begué, William J Johnston Middle School (WJJMS) Principal Christopher Bennett.

OTHERS PRESENT : Director of Finance and Operations Rachel Linkkila, Instructional Technology Coordinator Barbara Johnson, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Alyssa Fratoni, Director of Educational Operations Andrew Barillari.

1. MEETING OPENING

1.1. Call to Order
Chair Antonacci called the meeting to order at 5:05 PM

1.2 Roll Call
C.Rivers, D.Antonacci, M.Gignac and R.Gignac present in person.
M.Millington and S.Tracey-Calash present via Zoom.
A.Oliphant not present.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

2.1. For Public Comments, please see Bylaw on Meeting Conduct

- Nina Manella, Lebanon Ave, via Zoom
  - Ms. Manella stated that she reviewed an article in the *Rivereast* regarding a potential cut to the World Language program at WJ. She noted that this would be a very significant loss and expressed a desire for World Language instruction to begin at an earlier grade level. Advocated for maintaining funding for these programs in the budget.
- Vince Rose, Shadbush Drive
  - Mr. Rose echoed the previous speaker's comments, emphasizing that foreign language education is a necessity. He expressed deep concern over any significant budget cuts, stating that it's difficult to see how cuts can be made without critically impacting students. He described these cuts as a huge step in the wrong direction.

3. ***DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION**

Margaret Lewis, WJ Counselor, spoke about the ongoing and growing needs for mental health support for students.

Superintendent Sullivan provided an update on the Reduction in Force (RIF) process, noting that non-renewal notices must be issued to affected employees by May 1st, which limits the available time for decisions. He mentioned the possibility of a special meeting to address potential position eliminations and reviewed the current list under consideration.

M.Millington arrived in person at 5:18 PM

Principal Bennett addressed his concerns over the proposed cuts to the Team Structure in Grades 7 and 8 and the potential elimination of World Language at the Middle School level.

C.Rivers stated he would like the adjustments to the new hires salaries to be higher on the list.

Superintendent Sullivan discussed the topic of a now June referendum, noting that it creates a difficult timeline for hiring. Staff cannot be expected to wait and see if their positions survive the referendum. He emphasized the need to break the cycle of losing qualified employees due to uncertainty. Last year went well, but it's important to remain mindful of the challenges. He stressed that these are real people's jobs, and no formal notifications have been issued yet. He urged that clear direction is needed quickly to support staff planning and stability.

M.Gignac, R.Gignac and S.Tracey-Calash all shared the same sentiment that the thought of cuts is disheartening and sets us back.

There was discussion around the BA Theater Project. Barbara Johnson stated that we received notice that the grant has been awarded to us in the amount of $12,000 to be used to replace light bulbs and speakers. It was decided that the $12,000 received from the grant will be added to the proposed reductions list.

There was discussion around ECS Funding and Special Education money. ECS has not been finalized with the Governor yet, but it will not affect our budget. Special Education money will go to the town and how it is used will be up to the Board of Finance.

Principal Begué, via Zoom, discussed the potential reduction of one school social worker at BA, highlighting the high social-emotional needs among students. Services are already stretched thin, and further reductions would significantly limit the support available, resulting in doing less for students at a time when more is needed.

Principal Bennett also spoke about the potential cuts to the WJ Guidance Counselor, stating that the ratio will be 1 counselor to 444 students, where the recommended ratio is 1 to 250.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by: M.Gignac
Motion to adjourn.
Second: C.Rivers
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

Chair Antonacci adjourned the meeting at 5:59 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Afratoni

Alyssa Fratoni
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent